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FM AMEMBASSY SANAA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3602  
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0283

C O N F I D E N T I A L SANAA 000131

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/ARP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/23/2020  
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [YM](#)  
SUBJECT: ROYG APPROACHES LONDON CONFERENCE WARILY

REF: SANAA 83

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. The ROYG is approaching the January 27 London conference with a good deal of ambivalence, eager to shape what it regards as an "ambiguous" agenda and avoid being taken to task publicly by the international community for its shortcomings. According to Deputy Foreign Minister Mohyadeen al-Dhabbi, the ROYG will seek to highlight its commitment to the fight against al-Qaeda, its need for international support as it does, and the dire economic challenges in the country that create an atmosphere conducive to the growth of religious and political extremism. The ROYG delegation will include the Prime Minister, two deputy prime ministers, the Foreign Minister, and others. Recognizing the limitations of the two-hour discussion, the ROYG is looking forward to follow-on conferences that it hopes will include specific pledges of assistance. END SUMMARY.

#### THE ROYG'S GOALS IN LONDON

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12. (C) On January 23, Deputy Foreign Minister Mohyadeen al-Dhabbi spoke with the Ambassador about the ROYG's final preparations for the January 27 London conference. He characterized the goals of the conference organizers as "ambiguous" and indicated that ROYG officials felt "hurried" as they finalized the composition of the Yemeni delegation and prepared background materials. He said that Yemen's delegation would seek to convey three key messages in London: (1) that the ROYG is "fully committed to the fight against al-Qaeda;" (2) that Yemen needs international support to "be more successful" in this fight; and (3) that Yemen's economic problems compound the problem of terrorism and must be addressed. "It's a chance for Yemen to characterize what are the problems," he said. Dhabbi emphasized that terrorism alone should not be the focus of the conference, and that "the (potential) collapse of Yemen is the most important issue" to address. Dhabbi largely echoed what Deputy PM Alimi told the Ambassador on January 18 about the messages the ROYG seeks to deliver in London (reftel).

#### THE YEMENI DELEGATION

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13. (C) According to Dhabbi, the ROYG has selected seven people to attend the conference and may select more if space is available. He confirmed that Prime Minister Ali al-Mujawwar will head the delegation, which will also include Deputy Prime Minister for Security Rashad al-Alimi, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs Abdulkareem al-Arhabi, and Foreign Minister Abubakr al-Qirbi. Given the likelihood that U.K.-based southern Yemenis will stage protests outside the conference venue, Dhabbi said that the ROYG wanted to

include southerners in its delegation to counter protesters' claims about the south's political marginalization. (Comment: Apparently the southern origins of both PM Mujaawwar and FM Qirbi are insufficient to make the desired point. End Comment.)

#### YEMEN FRIENDLY TOWARD "FRIENDS OF YEMEN"

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¶4. (C) The ROYG seems receptive to the new "Friends of Yemen" group that will feature prominently on the agenda in London. Dhabbi said, "We are very happy with (the "Friends of Yemen" group) ... We need them to be frank with us" in discussing strategies to help Yemen overcome its current challenges. He indicated that there historically has been a lack of candor and transparency in Yemen's relations with the GCC countries, which he described as Yemen's "main donors," and he hoped that through this new initiative "the GCC will put its comments forward directly and frankly" without "hidden meanings." (Note: A few weeks before he left Yemen for his January 21 meeting with Secretary Clinton, FM Qirbi told us that the ROYG hopes the Western countries will "send a signal" in London to the Gulf countries that will result in increased Gulf support in the aftermath of the conference. End Note.) The Ambassador affirmed that the goal of the "Friends of Yemen" group is to promote "honesty and candor, with the intention to provide the necessary support" to address identified challenges.

#### ON THE ROAD TO RIYADH

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¶5. (C) Even as they put the finishing touches on their London remarks, Yemeni officials are looking beyond the two-hour meeting toward the follow-on conferences, which they expect to include specific pledges of assistance from donor countries. Dhabbi described a GCC-sponsored conference in Riyadh planned for February as "a very good idea," expressing hope that it will be conducted differently from the 2006 London conference. "Donors will come and say that it is the Yemeni government's fault that the pledges (from 2006) were never implemented," he said, but "we need to be frank with each other." Dhabbi said that Sana'a would be the most appropriate venue for a third conference, which envisions bringing together the "Friends of Yemen."

#### COMMENT

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¶6. (C) The ROYG sees both opportunities and risks in the international community's increased attention and engagement: though wary of foreign parties second-guessing its management of the country's manifold internal crises, it is eager to secure the financial assistance that can help revive its moribund economy. Expecting rewards for its recent offensives against al-Qaeda, the ROYG will try to use the London conference to underscore its financial needs, paving the road to next month's meeting in Riyadh with almost palpable expectations of substantial aid. END COMMENT.

SECHE